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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KBDS](#) [RU](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: SOUTH OSSETIAN REGIME CLAIMS 50,000 VOTE
IN "PARLIAMENTARY" ELECTIONS

REF: A. A. TBILISI 982
[1](#)B. B. MOSCOW 1403

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and Comment. Elections for the de facto South Ossetia parliament were held in South Ossetia on May 31 without any official internationally-recognized monitoring organizations taking part. De facto officials claimed to the Russian press that about 50,000 people voted, with 46 percent casting their ballots for Eduard Kokoity's Unity Party. The high voter turnout -- far more than the estimated total number of current residents -- suggests a fraudulent election. The Government of Georgia decried the results as illegitimate, as did the European Union. End Summary and Comment.

UNITY PARTY WINS

[1](#)2. (SBU) On May 31, voters in South Ossetia cast ballots for 34 parliamentary seats, which are allocated proportionally. According to the South Ossetia de facto election commission, current de facto "President" Eduard Kokoity's Unity Party won just over 46 percent of the vote, while the Communist Party and People's Party both won approximately 23 percent of the vote. The Fatherland Party did not exceed the seven percent threshold to enter parliament. The new "parliament" will therefore consist of 17 parliamentarians from Unity, nine from the People's Party and eight from the Communist Party. South Ossetian officials reported voter turnout was as high as 70 to 80 percent, and estimated that 50,000 people had voted. As noted in ref A, these numbers are highly inflated, as the total number of legitimate voters could be no higher than 30,000 (the number of eligible voters pre-August 2008), and were likely half that. Furthermore, despite the Unity Party enjoying only a 17 percent popularity rating, it still managed to secure an overwhelming victory. Minister of Reintegration Temuri Yakobashvili was quoted in the Georgian press as calling the results illegitimate, and the European Union issued a statement, saying that "the holding of such elections is illegitimate and represents a setback in the search for a peaceful and lasting settlement of the situation in Georgia."

NO GEORGIAN JOURNALISTS ALLOWED

[1](#)3. (C) Russian press reporting indicated that 110 foreign observers were present, and Russian monitors reported no serious irregularities. Neither the OSCE nor the EU monitored the process and little information on the reported foreign observers is available. Despite an open invitation to foreign journalists by de facto officials to witness the election, at least one Georgian reporter, Mari Otanashvili of Rezonansi newspaper, was briefly detained in Akhlagori and then evicted by South Ossetian militia. Otanashvili, who arrived in Akhlagori to report on the elections, was allowed to cross Georgian and South Ossetian checkpoints because she is registered in Akhlagori. After interviewing some elderly

Georgians remaining in South Ossetia who said they were thinking of voting to avoid trouble with the authorities, she entered the polling station at Secondary School 1. When the South Ossetians at the polling station learned she was Georgian, the local police were called in, and they transported her to the police station and said "Don't you know that we are not allowing Georgian journalists to work here?" After conducting a thorough personal search, the South Ossetian police officers escorted her back to the Russian checkpoint, and a Russian security official then escorted her to the Georgian checkpoint. According to Otanashvili, South Ossetian police officers said she can return to Akhmagori, but without her tape recorder and camera.

TEFFT